

Shay's Lounge

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It's almost four in the morning. My brother is driving us to the hospital. My boyfriend Dan and my sister are in the back seat. *I've been waiting for a girl like you to come into my life...* By some unspoken decree, we are listening to this Foreigner song on repeat. It has become our anthem. As we drive south on aurora from our mom's house to the hospital, we pass "Shay's Lounge", its pun emblazoned across a shamrock.

"Hey. If mom doesn't have a brain tumor, can we go to Shay's Lounge afterwards?"

"Yeah." My brother unrolls his window and lights a cigarette. I feel like Shay's Lounge is our Valhalla. *I've been waiting for a girl like you, your loving will survive.* We pull up to the hospital where my sister took our mom two mornings ago. I had been working a busy brunch when my sister texted me.

"I'm at the hospital with mom. I think you need to come here." I stepped out front of the restaurant and called her.

"What's up?"

Our mother, who hadn't been to a doctor or hospital since she gave birth to my brother at Swedish Hospital 32 years ago, had let my sister take her to the doctor. That was concerning. Apparently, there was something bad happening in her brain. She

was in a lot of pain, she had a fever, she couldn't see anything to her left. We all convened at the hospital where my mother held court, deflecting any fuss or emotional display. She wore her long white hair in a high ponytail and complained that "Some stooge named Fang" was making her remove her jewelry. I had never seen before, my mother unadorned. The doctors told us that there was either a tumor or an infection in the lobe of my mother's brain that concerned her vision.

We leave the hospital the night before her biopsy around midnight. We need to be there at four a.m. to kiss her before surgery, so instead of going to our separate homes we all drive together to our mother's house which is close to the hospital. We have never been there without her. It is not the home we were raised in. We march around her house, passing a bottle of Old Overholt between us.

"This is mine." My brother stands in front of a giant painting I have coveted my entire life, whiskey in hand. The painting has always been above our mother's bed.

"No fucking way dude." I grab the bottle.

"I want that painting." I swig. "I'll trade you for two of Jay's and the one by Jacques."

It feels like we have overrun the castle. We open drawers, we look in her cupboards. We marvel at her collection of tiny napkins, her candles, her chopsticks. We gather in a small bathroom where there's a strange hexagonal soaking tub. My brother rests inside the

empty tub, whiskey bottle across his belly, long legs and arms hanging out. My sister keeps wiping tears from her hot, pink cheeks. She tries over and over again to compose her face and fails. Dan is in the library playing Rachmaninoff on the out of tune piano at my behest. It is, after all, like bombs are dropping all around us. “What if mom dies.” One of us finally says out loud. *Sometimes I don't know what I'll find, I only know it's a matter of time.*

We stagger into the hospital and find our mother as she is being rolled into surgery. Her tinted glasses removed, her wrists bare of bangles, white and fragile. Her eyes, which are shaped like those of a small and pale fox, look uncertain, maybe even scared. We kiss her head. My sister bursts into tears. The doctor tells us we should be hoping that the biopsy reveals a brain infection, which could be treated with intravenous antibiotics. If it is a tumor, her chance of survival is much slimmer. Dan teaches me how to say the thing that we don't want about the thing that we don't want. “Me-tas-ta-size.” I repeat after him. Dan is very smart. “We hope that it's a brain infection.” I tell our loved ones over the phone. “Yeah...If it's a brain tumor, then it may have...” I search for Dan with my eyes. “Me-tas-ta-sized.” He mouths with me.

Around seven a.m. my brother and I are sitting in the waiting room. Dan and my sister have gone off to the cafeteria to bring us little juice cups. Little yogurts. Maybe a banana. The doctor comes in.

“Your mother is recovering, there were no complications.” We wait for it.

“We've discovered a lesion caused by a brain infection.” We fall out. We are elated. We embrace. Fists puncture the delicate air around us.

“Brain infection!” We repeat to each other.

When my sister returns, looking tired and jilted, unaware of the newfound confidence we have; we try to hold it in.

“Did the doctor come out yet?”

“No.” We say.

“NOPE.” We titter. We cannot contain ourselves.

“IT'S A BRAIN INFECTION!!!” We laugh, we cry. She punches our arms.

We walk into Shay's Lounge like a group of hard-bodied warriors, back from winning The Kingdom or something.

“Hello, we will take four Bloody Mary's please.”

We have Denver omelets the size of children.

(I've been waiting for a girl like you, I've been waiting) won't you come into my life?